

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

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Revised Approach to the Review of Existing Academic Programs
Coordinating Board for Higher Education
October 14, 2004

DESCRIPTION

In accordance with existing CBHE policy, public four-year institutions have been engaged in the regular review of existing academic programs for over 20 years. Consistent with performance excellence as one of the agency's three key result areas, MDHE is committed to fostering a set of processes that support this priority, including the review of existing academic programs. Currently, MDHE staff is working with institutional representatives to revise state guidelines for existing academic program review (E-APR), formerly known as campus-based review or CBR. While most of the discussion to date has focused on public four-year institutions, the public two-year sector has agreed to also explore with MDHE staff appropriate expectations and guidelines for their sector. The intent of this board item is to provide an update about the status of revisions to the state's requirements for E-APR.

Background

The original policy for the review of existing academic programs was first approved by the CBHE in 1983. In 1989 the policy was revised to emphasize the importance of linking reviews to institutional resource allocation decisions and assessment programs thereby acknowledging that reviews should involve both high-stakes decisions and a commitment to continuous improvement. A requirement for annual reporting was also established. The policy was again revised in 1992 and reaffirmed in 1996 by specifying key criteria that should be included in each review, e.g., evidence of addressing statewide needs, degree productivity, and student outcome measures. In addition to campus reviews, the board has periodically sponsored a number of statewide reviews focused on specific disciplines, e.g., biological sciences and computer sciences, though this approach has not been used in recent years.

Questions have been raised about the functionality and value of the state's approach to E-APR. For many institutions, the state's requirements for E-APR are perceived as simply an additional accountability burden with limited relationship to the everyday lives of students and faculty. In 2003, a State Auditor's report on higher education tuition levels called for E-APR to determine cost-effectiveness, to review whether the program meets a school's mission, and recommended that the MDHE should ensure E-APR is independently and objectively completed. In October 2003, state regulations associated with E-APR for the public four-year sector were postponed to provide MDHE staff an opportunity to work with institutional representatives in redesigning state expectations for E-APR in both substance and approach. MDHE staff also reiterated its interest in including public two-year institutions in a revised E-APR.

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In May 2004, Dr. William Massy, president of the Jackson Hole Higher Education Group, Inc., and author of *Honoring the Trust: Quality and Cost Containment in Higher Education*, facilitated a workshop on the academic audit approach to E-APR. Soon afterward, a working group of institutional representatives was formed to work with MDHE staff on developing a set of recommendations for revisions to E-APR. In July, this group began a dialogue about processes used by campuses to make high-stakes and continuous-improvement decisions and the related types of actions that occur as a result of E-APR.

Several campuses raised concerns about the intent of a revised set of state guidelines for E-APR and whether there would be significant flexibility for institutions. The presidents and chancellors of the public four-year institutions specifically requested that MDHE staff work with chief academic officers to establish agreed-upon objectives for a revision to E-APR. These objectives should then be used to inform future discussions of institutional representatives involved in the task group.

At a meeting on September 21, 2004, MDHE staff had an extensive discussion about the state's interest in E-APR with public four-year chief academic officers. Consensus among participants was that Missouri should avoid a "one size fits all" approach for state guidelines on E-APR and that the state should not engage in micro-management of institutions. It was also clarified that the academic programmatic data and information needed by DHE and CBHE should differ in content and depth from what is shared with the governing boards of each campus. Thus, any revised policy regarding E-APR would ideally focus on the institution as the unit of analysis instead of individual academic programs. It was acknowledged that the state does collect programmatic-level information for identified programs through other means and that when state needs, priorities and interests necessitate, DHE would administer an in-depth review of a single discipline across all institutions using an external campus process.

Participants also expressed general agreement for the following:

- Institutions and the state will benefit by DHE/CBHE better understanding the processes used by each campus for high stakes decisions, e.g., program consolidation, elimination, expansion, and resource allocation decisions, and for continuous improvement decisions, e.g., curriculum changes, delivery format changes, and assessment plans;
- State policy on E-APR should establish a framework for meaningful informed conversations between DHE/CBHE and institutions;
- The value of existing academic program review must be pervasive at all levels in order to yield improvement;
- A standardized format for reporting processes and types of results should be designed;
- Reports should align whenever possible with other external reports;
- In addition to written reports, further evidence that processes and resultant actions are actually being implemented should be gathered through systematic observation and exchange; and
- Public venues should be identified for sharing of best practices and challenges.

Institutional representatives and MDHE staff attended a work session on E-APR on September 22, 2004. Dr. William Massy also attended and helped facilitate the all-day meeting. Participants used the framework and parameters established by the chief academic officers to brainstorm a mechanism for institutions to report process and action-oriented information to DHE, a method and structure for follow-up conversations and questions, a list of implementation details, and appropriate venues to engage in institution-to-institution conversations. Participants also identified the following benefits that should accrue to institutions from a revised E-APR approach:

- Independent evaluation of E-APR campus processes,
- Constructive suggestions for addressing particularly difficult challenges,
- Use of the state's interest in E-APR to advance campus agendas, and
- Systematic array of positive E-APR examples for use with legislature, governor, and Missouri public.

Conclusions

Institutions are regularly engaged in high-stakes and continuous-improvement decisions. MDHE staff should continue to work with institutional representatives to ensure that any revisions to the state's guidelines and policies for E-APR continue to move away from a compliance model to one that supports sound process management for performance excellence and results in both continuous improvement and accountability for campus processes associated with E-APR. Any recommendations developed by the E-APR working group will be shared first with chief academic officers and then with sector organizations prior to being discussed by the Presidential Advisory Committee and presented to the CBHE for review and action.

STATUTORY REFERENCE

Section 173.005(7) CBHE statutory responsibility to collect the necessary information and develop comparable data for all institutions of higher education in the state . . .

Section 173.020(4) RSMo, CBHE statutory responsibility for designing a coordinated plan for higher education in the state . . .

Section 173.030(2) RSMo, CBHE statutory responsibility for recommending to governing boards of any institutions in the state the development, consolidation, or elimination of programs, degree offerings, physical facilities or policy changes where that action is deemed . . . in the best interests of the institution . . . and or the general requirements of the state.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

This is an information item only.

ATTACHMENT (S)

None